1921

A NEW SERIOUSNESS IN ALUMNI WORK

By

LOUIS R. WILSON, EDITOR OF THE ALUMNI REVIEW

of the

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

Since the meeting of this association at New Haven in April, two years ago, every editor of an alumni publication is conscious of having presented his readers with editorial exhortations concerning successively important alumni considerations.

First of all, a complete war record of every alumnus entering the service was demanded. Next, subscriptions to the alumni periodical for overseas men were solicited. Then followed the request for letters from alumni at the front, which, in turn, gave place to preparation for victory reunions, the printing of the record of the war activities of the universities, and finally the planning of memorials to the dead who fell in the defense of the freedom of the world.

The war over, emphasis was placed upon overhauling the curriculum, cutting out useless courses, speeding up and intensifying the educational machine, training the student in such a definite, thorough-going way that when he graduated he could achieve success in whatever field he entered.

THE YALE ALUMNI WEEKLY, possibly, furnished the most notable example of high seriousness in this last

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A NEW EMPHASIS IN ALUMNI WORK

By

LOUISE S. GRIFFIN, EDITOR OF THE ALUMNI NEWS

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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN CHRONICLE

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fundamental particular. It laid before the alumni and the governing authorities the need of a minute consideration of the entire educational policy of the university and kept the matter in the fore front until a complete plan of reorganization, largely influenced by alumni thought and profoundly affecting the future work of the whole university, was evolved.

The plight of the poverty stricken professor, with subsequent drives for endowment to relieve his distress, and to maintain the physical equipment of institutions, has recently received the attention of alumni writers, and today the money returns from these nation-wide efforts are steadily climbing up into the millions.

On the part of alumni the response to this sort of suggestion as presented by college authorities and alumni publications has been instant and whole hearted. Evidence has accumulated that alumni thought and behavior have been more serious in these two years than ever before, and the conviction has deepened throughout the nation that this high seriousness, this great reservoir of power, should regularly be more extensively drawn upon in promoting not only the educational work of American colleges and universities, but the educational policies of the nation as well.

With this introduction out of the way, I come to the real purpose of this paper, namely, to suggest additional ways and means by which this heightened seriousness on the part of alumni may further be utilized to the educational good of America.

In attempting to point out these ways and means I am thrown back upon the necessity of asking you as representatives of this Association to visualize vividly the situation which confronts American institutions of higher learning today, to draw deeply upon your own experiences as to the best methods of meeting it successfully, and to permit me to rely upon illustrations taken from my own institution - The University of North Carolina.

Any plan which really goes to the heart of this matter must recognize the importance of employing this fine alumni effectiveness, in addition to the ways already familiar to us, in three definite ways. First of all, alumni in local communities must be put to work upon matters that vitally affect the local community. Instead of meeting once a year, meetings should be held frequently, like Rotary and Kawanis organizations, the local associations should participage as alumni groups in promoting the welfare of the local community. Reminiscence should, give way in part to the consideration of constructive policies for the community and Alma Mater.

What I have in mind was recently illustrated by the alumni of Charlotte. An important local campaigns was being waged in the city to carry a bond issue election for the erection of a splendid city high school building. Approximately 200 alumni had membership in the local association. The association went on record as favoring the object and helped carry it through.

Noting the effectiveness of such activity as this, the alumni of the Asheville association have recently proposed to the General Alumni Association a plan b which the locals will meet regularly six or eight times a year, the hour of meeting being the same for all the locals. The object of these meetings is to promote the welfare of the institution to which they owe allegiance and the good of the local community.

With the ending of the war, there has come a quickened consciousness on the part of universities and colleges of their direct responsibility to the general public. The central western universities recognized this even before the war, and through a comprehensive system of university extension, were definitely promoting the larger direct public good. But only in the very recent past have the great eastern and southern institutions recognized this duty, and only recently have made the first beginnings in this important field. Here then, in backing the extension service of the colleges in their effort to reach in direct helpfulness a wider public, is a second distinct field for alumni service.

In 1912, when the University of North Carolina was first projecting its extension service, a group of alumni, former intercollegiate debaters, conceived the idea of promoting a debating union among the high schools of the State. In cooperation with the literary societies on the campus, they formed a debating organization, issued a debate handbook, helpdd direct the local contest, and, after completing a highly interesting final contest for the year turned over to the Extension Division an organization which in the eight years of

its existence has involved, from 200 to 400 schools, from eight hundred to sixteen hundred debaters, and a total audience of from forty thousand to eighty thousand annually. The subjects debated have been government ownership of railroads, compulsory military training, industrial arbitration, ship subsidies, an enlarged navy, and woman suffrage - subjects which have broadened the interests of the students themselves and contributed to a better understanding of these great questions which are engaging the attention of the nation today. By backing this movement the alumni have promoted the idea of the open forum in a rural state, have demonstrated the need of li raries and the use of books in secondary schools and villages, and have sent hundreds of North Carolina boys and girls from the high schools to college as a result of the stimulation received in these contests. Furthermore, the debating organization has carried over into other departments of secondary school life, with the result that physical education and recreation have been put upon a new basis throughout the State.

In March 1919, the Legislature of North Carolina adjourned after having enacted the most important body of laws affecting schools, health, child labor, juvenile courts, highways and taxation ever placed upon the statute books of the State. In July the executive departments in attempting to put the new laws into effect found themselves confronted with a mass of new details and complicated inter-relations, the proper adjustment of which could be made only by means of a council

of all the State and County officers concerned. Members of the Extension Division of the University sensed the situation, secured the backing of an alumnus who was willing to underwrite the idea if need be, and as a result the Governor of the State, the heads of the State departments of Education, Health, Public Welfare, Highways, and Taxation, together with county officials to the number of four hundred, met on the campus for a five-day conference and evolved a plan of co-operation which has been invaluable in the months that have followed. So successful in fact, was the getting together, that a permanent annual State and County Council has been founded at the University to better coordinate the machinery of State and county governments in carrying out an intelligent program of State and county betterment.

Other instances might be cited in which alumni influence backing some community program or statewide activity promoted by the University has given it vitality and reach. I do not include at this point, any reference to the establishment of scholarships, fellowships, endowments, and donations for buildings, libraries, hospitals, and other requirements of the modern college or university. These things of course are essential and have long since been recognized as such and provided for by alumni. But in addition to the part which alumni can play in direct service to their colleges, to their local communities, and through cooperation with extension agencies to states as a whole, there is a third way in which they can function in an even bigger way. They can always affect the fundamental educational policies

of the nation. And in a democracy such as ours, and which we wish to become finer and stronger, certainly this supreme opportunity of combined alumni service should be immediately seized and fully utilized.

At Greensboro North Carolina there was held last week the most significant educational conference the State has convened in a generation. Through the cooperation of the U. S. Commissioner of Education, the State department of Education, educators, business men, women's clubs, Rotarians, and others interested in the welfare of the State, the educational crisis which confronts the State and nation was boldly faced. Throughout the nation thousands of schools' doors have not been opened during the year on account of the lack of teachers. Of the 7000 school-houses in North Carolina, 700 were shut and the pupils in the districts which they were supposed to serve went without instruction - an unthinkable situation for a State already confronted with a high white illiteracy and a very short school term. Furthermore, of the 12,500 white teachers only one sixth have satisfied the full requirements essential to securing grade A certificates and 2000 of the total do not measure up to the minimum requirements essential to receive a certificate. The obstacle is the lack of school funds as well as the lack of normal schools. Here, certainly, is a situation which the alumni not only of the University of North Carolina but of every college in the State, could instantly improve if they went definitely and purposefully on record as in favor of adequate salaries for teachers and properly supported training schools. If they would slay

their full part in the performance of this high duty of intelligent citizenship, as well as meet athletic expenses or pile up endowment within campus walls, their contributions to State life would be multiplied a hundred-fold. In this conference, if the local alumni associations, instead of having established the reputation of devoting their thought and energy largely to reminiscence and athletics, had, like Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, or like the Charlotte Association to which reference has already been made, established a reputation for constructive community enterprise, their place in this great meeting would have been that of commanding honor and power. And what is true in this tremendously important particular in North Carolina, is equally true in every state in the nation.

In the South the alumni of the higher institutions of learning today stand in a particularly favorable position to affect the real destinies of the nation. Today the South is financially stronger than it has ever been before. In 1919 Texas led the forty-eight states in the Union in the production of crop values having produced over $1,000,000,000 worth of crops. My own State, North Carolina, was fourth in the list being preceded by Texas, Iowa, and Illinois and having produced approximately $700,000,000. To this she added over $400,000,000 in manufactured products, thereby producing over $1,100,000,000 of new values in the year. With this vast increase in wealth, with the establishment of ports on the Southern coast, and the reaching out after international trade, the South needs the full participation of all [illegible] its men of training in the work of building an enduring, fine

civilization. The pitfall of making money for more money's sake, should be avoided. The real value of a man and his complete development at the hands of society, should be the chief concern of the State and particularly so of the men and women who, within campus walls have learned to discover truth, and have been taught the high obligation of applying it to the work-a-day life of all men.

An additional obligation is laid upon the alumni of Southern institutions. This sudden accession of wealth, in connection with the recent establishment of state systems of high schools, is going to result in an overwhelming increase of college students. Therefore, not only are southern colleges confronted as are northern and western colleges, with the necessity of increasing their endowment and maintenance funds to enable them to meet the fierce competition for good teachers, but in addition they must also double and treble their physical equipment. Leadership of a high order is demanded here, leadership which can come from but one source - the alumni and educated men of the South.

Before concluding I am minded to say one further word. Fortunately I live in a section that has been particularly free from agitation by the Reds. Among all the men taken in the drag net of the government for agitation hostile to constituted authority only two (I quote the statement from the U. S. Commission of Education last week) have been from below the Mason and Dixon's line, and those two were in Louisville on the south bank of the dividing line. In my

section, and in all sections, it is the duty of all alumni to recognise that they can be the potential factor in conserving and promoting the democratic solidarity of our institutions and government. This sentiment was expressed yesterday afternoon. It needs restatement and added emphasis every day until alumni recognize themselves as the prepared mobiled force of the nation to meet the situation, incident to the great upheaval resulting from the war. Furthermore, they must undertake this tremendous task not in a spirit of aloofness and resentment, but rather in that of the fine disciplinarian and teacher who has discovered the best way of handling unruly school boys is first to understand them, and then wisely direct them.

From:
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